

Random Memento's of a Returning Native Son

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This is a photo of the ravages of the "Unnamed Halloween Storm" on Duxbury Beach, 1993.

There was no doubt about it, as I dug my heel into the sand and broken pieces of rock on a spot just north of High Pines on Duxbury Beach. This was the place where Hunt's gunning stand stood. I walked a few yards out on the stretch of marsh and said to myself, "Here is where the 'flyers' were quartered and released when a migrating flock of several hundred geese had been sighted, to take the leadership and bring them down in front of the stockade to be dispatched on signal by the dozen or so hunters who stood behind the stockade."

"Over there is where our horse Prince stood behind a 15-foot sand dune that cold early December night, when my sister Ruth and I had delivered a load of supplies for the hunters. And it was from here that Prince had taken off and made his way home while we were guzzling warm cocoa and eating donuts in the kitchen of the shelter. We had to follow on foot crawling from telephone pole to telephone pole through the tall beach grass on that moonless night and so home. Father's only comment when we reached our house on lower Washington St. was, "Well the horse at least showed some sense."

A second memento close to the beach and dependent on it was the old Gurnet Bridge. It had been erected between 1892 and 1895 as a planned access to what was going to be a development of 263 house lots the length of the beach. It was abandoned when two back to back blizzards had lowered the dunes of the beach from 35 to 40 feet to 15 and 20. The Wrights, who had bought the beach with this development in mind, knew such storms would also wipe out their cottages, so, although the plan

Duxbury Clipper, Wednesday, December 20, 1995

was canceled they made good their promise and paid a third of the cost of the construction, i.e., \$10,000. (The cost of the present bridge was 3 million.)

The second thing was the draw. Much opposition must have been stirred up by the building of the bridge as the packet boat and Ford's and Weston's ships made regular runs into Back River and Bourne's Wharf. So a draw bridge was cut into the bridge over the channel with double platforms, one on either side and a manually operated chain winch to raise the loser the draw. This necessitated the erection of two 5 foot high posts to lift the draw high enough to enable the tall masts of sailing ships to pass through. These posts allowed daring young men, like Eben Briggs, to climb up and dive into the channel on a hot August afternoon. (I dared only use the railing.)

Another memento would be the Blue Fish River with its tidal in and out flow, through which square rigged sailing vessel's hulls, being outfitted up river by 22 facilities, emerged into the bay to be completed by Ezra Weston's rope and cabinet workers. These pilings still stand on the marsh at Long Point.

A significant memory about this river details an experience my brother Henry and I had in the dead of winter, the thermometer standing at fifteen or twenty degrees. My father was running a retail meat business which was normally peddled by horse and wagon. But once in a while a special order was phoned in as was the case today. It was the Reynolds family who lived on Surplus Street, like us numbering nine youngsters.

It was an eight pound loin of pork, Mrs. Reynold's had ordered, and father said he wanted it delivered at once. The labor of harnessing the horse and hitching him to the wagon, being a bit much, my brother Henry whispered in my ear. "If you'll go with me we can take a short cut on the frozen river." This added an element of danger and hence adventure to the trip, salt water ice being far less strong than fresh water. Added to this was the fact that the tide was coming in and floating all the ice toward the shore.

But never mind, we trotted down our hill and made it easily to the middle section of the river where smooth and solid ice buoyed us nicely and we were on our way. The only question was how we would get to shore as a wide chasm of water filled with ice cakes provided our only exit. The river at this point was perhaps fifty feet wide. i.e. sixty years ago.

I made a bold move leaping to shore and turned around to help Henry, who was carrying the eight pound pork loin. At this point Henry also made a bold attempt to reach the river bank tossing the pork loin to me. The gesture was disastrous as the ice cake he was using slipped down under the main sheet of ice dousing him totally into the icy water. He clambered out, leaped to solid shore and began to run shouting to me, "My clothes will freeze on me, but if I keep running, I'll be OK."